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DIRECTORATE OF
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Developments in Indochina

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State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

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SOUTH VIETNAM

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Shelling of Tonle Cham continues and the Communists briefly penetrated the perimeter of the camp on 2 April. An assessment of the cease-fire in MR-2 concludes that the level of violence has dropped, but has by no means ended. The

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Secretary-General Waldheim is not inclined to give the PRG UN status.

LAOS

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Souvanna refuses Communist demands that political and military agreements be linked.

CAMBODIA

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The President is making plans to remove his troublemaking brother from office. Sections of Routes 1, 2 and 4 remain closed.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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Peking still pleased with the way things are going in Vietnam.

Editor's Note: The Developments in Indochina will no longer be published on a daily basis. Publication will occur semiweekly on Tuesday and Friday.

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SOUTH VIETNAMThe Military Situation

The Communists are keeping up pressure against the government's Tonle Cham ranger camp in northern Tay Ninh Province. On 2 April the camp was shelled throughout the day and a sapper attack briefly penetrated the perimeter.

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MR-2 at X + 60

The US consul general in Nha Trang concludes that during the first 60 days of the cease-fire there has not been any significant change in the control of territory or population in Military Region 2 (MR-2)--or in the balance of military or political forces there. The over-all level of violence has dropped considerably, but has by no means ended. Thus far, the supervisory machinery has left much to be desired, and the ICCS investigations are tending more and more to split along ideological lines.

The consul general goes on to say that the government has rolled back the gains made by the Communists around the time the cease-fire went into effect, and has begun to operate in areas lost during the Communist offensive last spring. Nevertheless, officials in the region are fearful of large-scale Communist infiltration of supplies and troops. Nearly all of them

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expect another enemy "offensive" in the near future, although of less intensity than last spring's. Both sides are expected to pursue "nibbling" operations, particularly in populous Binh Dinh Province and in the western highlands. The level of fighting in the weeks ahead may be determined by how hard and how fast such operations are pushed, according to the consul general.

As for the political struggle, the consul general believes most of the government's effort remains focused on promoting President Thieu's Democracy Party, although not as vigorously as two months ago. The party may, however, have a chance to flex its muscles for the first time in a series of village elections over the next two months. The government's "Popular Front" and "Political Struggle Committees" have not been very active after their initial efforts. They seem to have little purpose other than as potential weapons in the event of a sudden political showdown with the Communists.

The government, according to the consul general, is devoting considerable time and attention to reconstruction and resettlement. The MR-2 commander has been stressing pacification since early March, primarily by moving refugees closer to their former homes in Binh Dinh and Kontum provinces. There are reports that the Communists are doing the same thing and have set up working "revolutionary administrations" in some areas.

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The PRG and the UN

Secretary-General Waldheim has assured US officials that he will refuse the PRG request for observer status at the UN in New York. He said that the PRG cannot be granted observer status because it does not meet the established criteria, despite its recent appointment of a UN representative. Waldheim apparently still hopes to establish some contact which might facilitate a UN role in Vietnam reconstruction, and he may be considering a PRG liaison office in Geneva. The PRG has said it will soon appoint a Geneva representative.

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LAOSNegotiations

Prime Minister Souvanna told chief Communist delegate Phoune Sipraseuth on 3 April that linking the military and political discussions was completely inadmissible. Phoune responded that separating the two issues would be "very difficult," but offered to telegraph Pathet Lao headquarters at Sam Neua for further instructions. Phoune's need for guidance undercuts his claim that he has full power to negotiate, and reinforces the impression that he is just a messenger.

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Little Military Activity

Only a few very minor incidents were reported on 2 April. The Lao Air Force flew no combat sorties, for the first time since the cease-fire began in February.

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CAMBODIACabinet Reshuffle

Lon Non, the President's brother, may be on his way out of the government. He told some of his cronies on 3 April that his resignation from the Interior Ministry had been accepted, and that he would give up his political activities to concentrate on military affairs. Lon Non's removal, part of a cabinet reshuffle, may be an effort to stabilize the political situation and broaden the base of Lon Nol's government. The finance minister has already resigned, and the ministers of labor and information reportedly will also be replaced.

Lon Nol's efforts may not be enough. His brother's power and troublemaking potential flow directly from his relationship with the President, not from his governmental titles and posts.

At this point, any significant increase in political agitation by disaffected army officers would severely strain governmental stability, already shaken by other major problems.

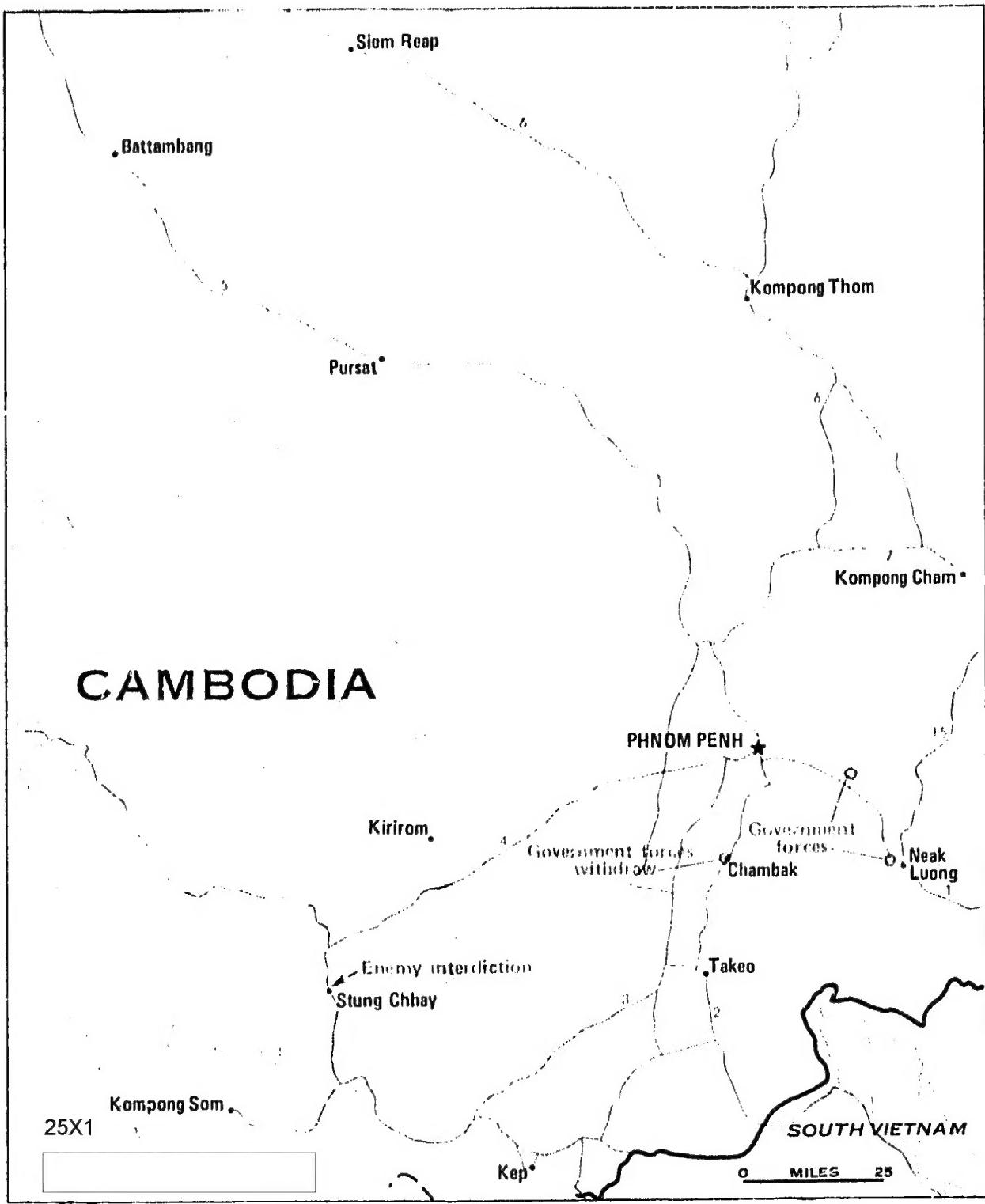
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The Military Situation

Government efforts to reopen Route 1 between Phnom Penh and the Mekong River continue to make little headway. Two Cambodian brigades trying to clear the lower end of the highway have been returned to the capital for rest and refitting. They

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have been replaced by another brigade, which was landed near Route 1 by the Cambodian Navy in the face of heavy enemy fire. The navy also landed a paratroop battalion farther south.

There has been another government setback along Route 2 between Phnom Penh and Takeo. Khmer insurgent harassing attacks on 2 April caused three Cambodian battalions to abandon the town of Chambak. These units are part of the replacements for the 7th Division, which had been trying to clear the highway to Takeo. The 7th--the government's best fighting force--returned to Phnom Penh early in the week because of heavy casualties. Its failure may have worsened the army's already shaky morale.

Lon Nol has ordered Brigadier General Chantangsey, the commander of the 13th Brigade Group, to evacuate the recently recaptured town of Kirirom north of Route 4 and to send two of his battalions to the Route 2 front. Chantangsey--who has figured prominently in the recent spate of coup rumors in Phnom Penh--may not respond to the President's order. Chantangsey has traditionally confined his units to operations along Route 4, and he may be reluctant to abandon his gains in the Kirirom area.

Route 4 remains closed in the vicinity of Stung Chhay, some 50 miles north of the seaport of Kompong Som. Local government forces are trying again to clear the road, but thus far have made no progress. [redacted]

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Peking has reaffirmed its relaxed view of the situation in Vietnam, in its first authoritative public comment on the subject in nearly a month. An editorial in *People's Daily* on 2 April appears far more sanguine about the condition of the cease-fire and US actions in Southeast Asia than earlier North Vietnamese Government and PRG statements which the editorial ostensibly supports.

People's Daily makes no mention of some incidents which Hanoi and the PRG claim are American and South Vietnamese violations of the Paris Agreement, and glosses over others in relatively mild language. For example, Hanoi charged that the continued presence of US military forces in Thailand and the Pacific threatens security in Southeast Asia, but the editorial catalogs acts of compliance with the agreement by both sides and says that these are conducive to peace in Vietnam and "the easing of the situation in Southeast Asia." In line with Peking's cautious handling of Washington since President Nixon's visit, *People's Daily* does not mention recent high-level American statements regarding Communist compliance with the cease-fire. Both Hanoi and the PRG referred to such statements as "threats."

The editorial does imply a measure of American responsibility for Saigon's actions and explicitly lines up the Chinese Government behind North Vietnamese and PRG demands that Saigon "stop at once all violations." *People's Daily* also states that Peking supports Vietnamese Communist efforts to prevent "sabotage" of the agreement by "the forces of war and reaction." [redacted]

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